

12-1-1984

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Recommended Citation

Wikén, Erik (1984) "Captain Carl Hård of Victoria, IL," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 4 : No. 4 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol4/iss4/3>

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Captain Carl Hård of Victoria, IL

Erik Wikén*

The *Helsi*, a newspaper published in Söderhamn, Sweden on 28 July 1848, contained a letter from America, dated Victoria, IL 18 Feb. 1848, and here translated from the Swedish as follows:

“To you my friends in the old country I extend my humble thanks for the last hours spent in your company. I wish to begin this letter by briefly relating something of the journey from Sweden to America, in addition to something concerning my stay here until this very day. On 8 July we sailed from Stockholm and arrived in New York 13 Sept. During practically the entire journey we suffered continuous storms and head winds, until we reached the Newfoundland Banks, which occurred on 28 Aug. at noon. We made a sounding and found that we had only 35 fathoms. At 4 o'clock p.m. we were completely becalmed, whereupon we equipped ourselves with fishing gear, consisting of very fine fishing lines. Four lines were prepared for the captain, one each for the first mate, me and the crew and for the next 2½ hours we hauled in no less than 74 cod, of which most were a pound, and none less than a half pound. You can imagine how much fun we had fishing and we would have continued, had not darkness set in. After this episode we enjoyed fine weather and arrived here in good order.

When we stepped ashore we heard of all the bad things being perpetrated by Erik Jansson and his prophets, how the poor people have starved and some have slaved so hard, that they have died. When dead, they have piled the bodies in heaps, since the prophets do not want to bury one at a time, but wait until they have six, seven or eight to bury. Even the healthy people must sleep in the same room where the bodies lie; you can therefore imagine their misery. But the prophets, themselves, live well, disporting themselves with every kind of vice. At this time my wife's eyes were opened and she determined to turn her back on Erik Jansson and his teachings, whereupon she decided on the advice of Pastor Hedström, to join the Methodist Church, which even I did.

We stayed in New York nine days. On 21 Sept. we embarked on a steamship in order to come here. We first arrived at a place named Albany, which consumed seven hours of travel. From Albany we embarked upon a canal boat which brought us to Buffalo. The boat was drawn by two or three horses, which were changed from time to time. This canal is man-made and has a total of 85 locks. You can well imagine how beautiful it was to travel through such gorgeous scenery. Later we continued our journey

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from Buffalo via steamship through three Great Lakes until we reached Chicago, where we began our journey to the interior of the country. To this place, which was 25 Swedish miles (150 English miles) we arrived on 8 October.

After we had been here a total of eight days, my brother-in-law appeared in order to escort us to the Erik Janssonists, but my wife remained adamant, so that he had to retreat shame-facedly. He had taken Hedin with him, in order to reinforce his invitation, but everything went awry. A week later he returned, nevertheless, when he tempted her to come and visit them, which she did, with the proviso that I was to come after two days and bring her home. But this time it did not work—she did not wish to come and I had to return alone. After she had been there (i.e. Bishop Hill) ten days, she returned with her brother and Hedin in order to fetch her things and return. This was to be accomplished by “hook or by crook,” but I decided that neither she nor her things were to be taken. The men in this community are very upset with the Erik Janssonists and called upon the sheriffs, who in turn forbade my brother-in-law and Hedin to take my wife or her things. The men got the visitors to admit their errand, that of fetching my wife and her things, whereupon they were arrested immediately, and within an hour a hearing was held. They were adjudged a fine of \$100 each or the posting of bail to appear in court, which will be held this coming May, when they probably would be sentenced to three years in prison. They posted bail and left.

This happened on 30 Oct. On 4 Nov. my wife fled from our house and returned to the Janssonists. What was I to do, a stranger in a strange land? But God rules the hearts of men, and it was the people where I am now lodging, who opened their doors for me, and I am now staying here and feel well, praise the Lord. After seven seeks it seemed to me as if my wife would not return to me, during which time, as you might well imagine, I was beset by constant anxiety. A few days before Christmas I decided to go to the Janssonists—we have only 2½ Swedish miles (about 15 English miles) between us. But they are so puffed up by their selfrighteousness that they do not wish to show any kindness, because they are afraid. I stayed over the Christmas holidays which were celebrated by the women at their sewing and knitting and by the men by their chopping wood or carving wooden beams. In the same manner they also celebrated New Years Day. Two weeks later I was back again, when I discovered that my wife had become quite mean. I have been back several times and each time I go there she seems more hostile than before, in fact the last time I was there, I could not even sleep in her house, the two nights I spent there. You can well imagine, therefore my present condition. I accept this cross, however, as punishment for the fact that I did not remain in my own homeland, and yet I must praise the Lord, who continuously supports me. I enjoy good health and get along well with the people, where I reside. I eat when I am hungry and work when I am able.

My wife has now been absent from me for three months, which means that she has not had the opportunity of looking after my clothes, or mending them, but last week she came and was quite friendly and I thus allowed her to take some of her clothes with her. I am considering moving there (to Bishop Hill) in order to try to stay there, but I will never accept their teachings, you can be assured that with God's aid and comfort I shall remain steadfast on the Rock of Christ.

I have now told you briefly of my arrival here and the relation-

ship between me and my wife. I will now discuss Erik Jansson. He is very much what he was like in Sweden, with his sermons of doom and damnation for those who do not accept him as being sent by God, even though all of his prophecies have come to naught, and not one of them has been realized. Even his prophecy that many people would flock to his banner has failed, not one person has he been able to win, since people have remained loyal to their sects. He might get a few scoundrels, since they are in plentiful supply around here, and these are just the type of persons who would bring down Erik Jansson and his teachings, which he well deserves. Of the approximately 1,200 persons who left Sweden with the goal of Bishop Hill in mind, he only has about 570 persons left. 200 have left him and dwell here and there in these parts. The remainder has perished, which has been brought about to a great deal by the mismanagement of human life by Erik Jansson and his apostles.

When they died, some of them received caskets, others did not, but were dumped into a common grave much like dead cattle. It is somewhat better now, but even so, there is no burial service, but they are carried out in the middle of the night, much as if they were suicides. The dugout shelters are quite comfortable and hold from 20 to 30 persons. But they have built a wooden house, where Erik Jansson and the other lazy rascals reside. I can assure you, however, that the farmers in Sweden have better stables and barns than they have parlors. Referring to their economic conditions, I must admit that they have done quite well. They have acquired a great deal of land. The place where Erik Jansson lives is called Bishop Hill. They produce a lot of handcraft, which they sell and thus collect money. They even make whisky. My question is this—are they God's people? To which they answer by saying that they do everything to glorify God. Mornings and evenings they have prayer services and on Sundays they have a morning service and yet they sell whisky on the Sabbath. The people receive food and clothing, but not coffee nor sugar—this is kept solely for the benefit of the apostles. Their cooking is Swedish. They have three dining rooms with four long tables in each room. No one is permitted to prepare his or her own food. They are almost as if they were serfs and everything is done by the tolling of the big bell. At 6 o'clock in the morning the bell tells them to rise, at 6:30 it is morning prayers, which lasts until 8 or 9 o'clock, when it rings for breakfast. When they have eaten, the bell is rung for going to work, and then dinner and then supper. When the evening meal has been finished the bell calls them to evening prayers, which have the same duration as the morning session. Everything that Erik Jansson says must be believed and acted upon. He is waxing as arrogant as Nebuchadnezzar and his dream, described in the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel. The same thing will happen to Erik Jansson as happened to Nebuchadnezzar.

Now I have briefly related to you concerning Erik Jansson and his victims, and it is as true as I have spoken. I might also say that everyone here in the country is angry with Erik Jansson and he has thus gained nothing.

Now something concerning the country itself. It is a good country, the soil is rich and the black loam is easily cultivated. There is plenty of land here, but very little forest. He, who is young, and has money can soon find a piece of property, without going to Erik Jansson. Young people can easily earn money here and yet I would ask my countrymen to stay home in their native land, since here they meet so many difficulties, which they never anticipated.

Here it is easy to raise cattle, since they can remain outside throughout the winter, so that it is not necessary to construct cattle sheds. It is not difficult to procure fodder, since there are wide prairies for many miles around. Cooking is simple but good. Each household has its own stove made of cast iron, complete with a fine oven. These are fired daily with wood or coal, so that they are always hot. Thus one can prepare a meal within an hour's time. The dishes they serve are usually cooked or fried pork, sometimes beef, pickled redbeets, cucumbers and onions, cooked cabbage head and carrots. One does not use soups here. Breakfast usually consists of hot rolls, butter, fried bacon and boiled potatoes as well as two or three cups of coffee. At dinner time one also consumes pies and pastries, which though prepared beforehand, are placed in the oven to be heated up. When company comes it is customary to also serve ginger cookies and pound cake. Instead of soups, coffee and tea are drunk. Every cabin is clean and in good order.

Greet relatives and friends from me. I will now close this letter with the wish that you are all well. The Lord bless you and keep you and allow his protective hand to rest over me and you. Don't forget to greet all, all are warmly greeted by their real friend, who here walks the earth as a stranger, but daily has his friends, siblings and brothers in mind. Farewell— it pleases me that I can say this to you, even at this distance.

N. N.¹

P.S. Greet all those who are foolish enough to wish to come here and tell them that they ought to stay at home in their own native land."

The letter cited above has been attributed by John E. Norton² to Olof Bäck, whom I discussed in an earlier article, published in *SAG* in March of this year,³ but it can scarcely have been he. Bäck went, as I mentioned, alone, but one year after his wife, Sigrid Hertman, who was an Erik Janssonist.⁴ The letter writer, has obviously come with his wife, since he tells us that after his arrival in New York 13 Sept. 1847, he and his wife joined Hedström's⁵ Methodist Church, before leaving for the interior. There is therefore little doubt that we here are dealing with a J. Hardt 61 years old, and Mrs. Hardt, 54 years old, who arrived aboard the *Norden* at New York on 13 Sept. 1847.⁶ These people are doubtless also identical with a merchant sea captain named Carl Hård and his wife, Lovisa Ulrika Hård, born Blombergsson.⁷

Carl Hård belonged to a branch of the ennobled family Hård af Segerstad.⁸ He was born in Hanebo Parish (Gävl.) 5 Feb. 1786, the son of Lieut. Johan Adolf Hård af Segerstad and his betrothed, Beata Lundmark. In his second marriage, Carl Hård married Lovisa Ulrika Blombergsson, born also in Hanebo Parish 3 Dec. 1793, the daughter of Fredrik Blombergsson, a civil servant (*expeditionsfogde*), and Maria Charlotta Söderbom. His second wife was a sister of the book printer, used within the Erik Janssonist movement, Carl Gustaf Blombergsson, who had emigrated already in 1846.⁹

The Hård couple had no children and emigrated to America from the village of Östra Flor in Mo Parish (Gävl.), receiving passports in Gävle 3 June 1847. From the letter we learn that the wife earlier had been a follower of Erik Jansson, but had left the movement when she arrived in New York and heard some of the stories from the Swedish settlement in Bishop Hill.

After the couple reached Victoria, IL, the brother of the wife, in this case, Carl Gustaf Blombergsson, arrived twice from Bishop Hill, the first time in company of a tailor, named Hedin.¹⁰ On the second attempt he succeeded in getting the sister to come along and when she later came back to Victoria to pick up some of her clothes, Hård tried to keep her, but she escaped to Bishop Hill. Not even Christmastime 1847 could Hård convince her of returning to him. She remained in Bishop Hill at least until a meeting was held there in May of 1854. In the minutes of that meeting, there is a note in the margin which states that she had left the colony.¹¹

Concerning Captain Hård, himself, we don't know very much, whether he carried out his plans of trying to move to the Bishop Hill colony. We only know that he was dead when Daniel Londberg wrote his letter from Galesburg 30 Oct. 1849.¹² Londberg in his letter asks the recipient of the letter to inform Bodell in Söderala concerning Captain's Hård's death. It is highly probable that the addressee of Hård's letter of 18 Feb. 1848 is precisely this Bodell—Hans Olof Bodell, an army sergeant, living in Mariedal in the parish of Söderala (Gävl.).

¹N.N. used in this context stands for the Latin phrase *nomen nescio*, meaning that the name is unknown. Used in Swedish it carries the same significance as the use of John Doe or Richard Roe, used in English legal parlance to designate an unknown or unidentified person.

²John E. Norton, "... We Have Such Great Need of a Teacher": Olof Bäck, Bishop Hill, and the Andover Settlement of Lars Paul Esbjörn" in *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* (now *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*) (*SPHQ*), Vol. XXVI, p. 220, note 2.

³Erik Wikén, "Olof Bäck and the Hertman Family" in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 11-19.

⁴Follower of the Swedish sect leader, Erik Jansson, who in 1846 established the communalistic settlement in Bishop Hill, IL.

⁵Olof Gustaf Hedström (1803-1877), Swedish Methodist pastor in New York, who at his chapel on board the *Bethel* ship in New York's harbor met many of the early Swedish immigrants. In some instances he recommended that in going West the immigrant head for Victoria, IL, where there was land, and where his brother, Jonas Hedström (1813-1859), pastor of the local Methodist Church stood ready to help.

⁶Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850* (Stockholm and Chicago 1967) (*SPANY*), p. 149, note 30. As I stated earlier in my article on Olof Bäck, the *Norden* departed from Stockholm and not Leghorn.

⁷As indicated by Nils Hård af Segerstad, "Kompletteringar och rättelser till genealogiska (sic!) arbeten" in *Släkt och hävd*, 1980-1981, pp. 270-271.

⁸Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I-IX (Stockholm 1925-1936), III, p. 719; Erik Hård af Segerstad, *Hårdska släktboken* (Stockholm 1972), p. 147.

⁹*SPANY*, 71, note 35.

¹⁰Nils Jonsson Hedin, a tailor, had arr. in New York 21 Sept. 1846 and became one of the leaders in the Bishop Hill colony.—*SPANY*, pp. 104-105, note 47.

¹¹*Släkt och hävd*, 1980-1981, p. 271.

¹²Dan. Londberg, *Nytt bref ifrån Amerika om Erik Jansarnes tillstånd derstädes* (Söderhamn 1850); Paul H. Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah*. Eric Jansson of Bishop Hill (Carbondale & Edwardsville 1976), p. 143 gives an erroneous identification of Londberg's Captain Hård. Also erroneous is the statement in *SPANY*, p. 149, note 30, that the John Hart, who received his naturalization papers as a U.S. citizen 5 Oct. 1857 is identical with the passenger aboard the *Norden*.